

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: March 12, 2015

Agenda Item: Wallis Ranch Conservation Easement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The Wallis Property is comprised of approximately 1,179 acres of private land adjacent to the Musselshell River in FWP Region 5. The property is five miles east of Lavina and one mile south of Highway 12. The area has a high level of terrestrial species richness and provides key winter range for mule deer and white-tailed deer. Upland game birds include sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants, turkeys, and gray partridge. Cottonwood and riparian floodplains make up approximately 15 percent of the property. As a result of recent, severe flooding there is active cottonwood regeneration in riparian areas and many species of concern are likely to use these areas. Approximately 65 percent of the plant communities on this property are considered by the 2014 State Wildlife Action Plan to be of greatest conservation need.

The landowner and his family intend to provide quality wildlife habitat while maintaining their livelihood under the terms of an FWP conservation easement. They are interested in providing additional public access for hunting, fishing, and recreation in an area where opportunities are limited.

A conservation easement on this property would conserve and enhance a variety of valuable wildlife habitats and would prevent fragmentation from subdivision or other land use changes in the future. Public access for hunting and fishing would also be secured under the terms of a conservation easement.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analyses, public review processes and negotiations.

Alternatives and Analysis

The conservation easement alternative allows the property to remain in private ownership while conserving and enhancing habitat, and providing recreational access. Given current trends in the area surrounding the Wallis property, it is probable that if sold in the future this parcel would be converted for subdivision or other land use changes. If FWP took no action, the land may eventually be sold to a recreational buyer or a developer. Opportunities to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat, and increase public access would be lost.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

Because of the importance of conserving this land, including the high resource values and public recreational opportunities, FWP recommends that the Commission endorse this proposal so that FWP may proceed to further develop this opportunity.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse this conservation easement project, allowing FWP to initiate negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.